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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

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Thesis

A SURVEY OF THE IRISH THEATER

by

Norris Potter, Jr.

(A.B., Colby College, 1929)

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Introduction

I chose to entitle my thesis "A Survey of the Irish Theater" rather than "A Survey of the Irish Drama" because there is very little evidence that a native Irish drama existed before the latter part of the 19th century. There was, however, a flourishing Irish theater, even though it was usually English or Anglo-Irish in character, appearing only in the larger Irish towns.

Part One offers an explanation for the absence of an autochthonous drama in Ireland, a strange absence which has been overlooked by most books on the drama. In this part there will be considerable reference to political and social phenomena, since the drama of a nation is definitely congruent with the type of civilization in which it is placed.

Part Two is principally concerned with a description of the Irish theaters in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, and of the theatrical fare that was served up to the playgoers of those years. In this part, too, there will be frequent references to the social, political, and religious forces which served to suppress the dramatic instincts of the race.

Part Three is a treatment of the social and intellectual forces which gave birth to the literary revival of the late 19th and early 20th century---a period which was marked by the production of what is generally regarded as the first native Irish play: "The Twisting of the Rope", by Douglas Hyde, written in the Irish language. The history of the famous Abbey Theater is briefly sketched; the works of the most important of the 20th century dramatists are described; an attempt is made to forecast future developments in the Irish theater.

So far as I know, there has been no other attempt made to cover the whole field of Irish drama, however briefly. There have been written, however, quite exhaustive surveys in limited periods. It has been my purpose to unite numerous and fragmentary sources into a thesis which will give a bird's-eye view of what has happened on the Irish stage, with particular reference to the reasons for the late development of Irish native drama.

In selecting my sources for Irish political history, I have tried to strike a balance between pro-English and pro-Irish historians : it would seem that in discussing Anglo-Irish political relations many historians allow cool judgment to be warped by partisan feeling.

I. Origin of Drama

Savage tribes, terrified and puzzled by the mysterious Nature around them, enacted rude ceremonies to propitiate the gods. With singing and dancing they addressed pleas to their idols. These ceremonies, containing the germ of drama, became more and more formalized and elaborate until they possessed the semblance of a play. ¹/ Moved by a child-like pleasure in imitation, they evolved other dramas not directly designed as religious worship---they produced crude representations of their own society. The drama served as a means of introducing the young into the mores of the tribe. It was also an effective method of stimulating public action, of arousing war-like ardor.

From the religious drama of the Greeks, originating in the worship of Dionysus, comes much of our worthwhile drama, ancient or modern. ²/ The Dionysiac festivals, in honor of the god of fruit and vineyard, were held in the spring and in the early winter, the former giving birth to tragedy (in which Dionysus was praised by means of the dithyramb, or choral dance accompanied by illustrative gestures to show incidents in the life of the god) and the latter giving birth to comedy (a "comus" or band of revellers who marched, chanted, and gave impromptu speeches).

³/ "Thespis, the reputed father of tragedy, added an actor to the singing, dancing group and thus made it possible to act out the adventures of Dionysus. In the course of time Thespis or others so extended the subject matter of tragedy that it was no longer limited to stories of Dionysus but might treat almost any religious theme or story. ...Aeschylus, the oldest playwright whose work has come down to us, made many important contributions to the development of tragedy. The most

1. Havemeyer: Drama of Savage Peoples---Chap.I

2. Hubbell and Beaty: An Introduction to Drama---Chap.One

3. Ibid: Page 20

important of these was the addition of a second actor. With two actors on the stage, it was possible with the assistance of the chorus, to stage a fairly complicated story."

II. Lack of dramatic inspiration in early Irish religion

A. Description of Druidism

The student of Irish drama is immediately aware that the country lacks a dramatic tradition. At no time before the late 19th century does the stage appear to have held permanently the affection of the people. Religion offered no incentive to play production as it did in Greece. The trade guilds were not favorable to miracle and morality plays as they were in England. Yet the Irish are intensely dramatic in temperament, and their literature has immense potentialities for drama.

Since religion plays so great a part in the forming of a dramatic tradition, it is worthwhile to examine early Irish systems, both pagan and Christian, in an effort to find the germs of drama. There is little trustworthy information regarding the pagan faiths. What accessible knowledge we have comes from native literature written in Christian times by Christian copyists who diluted and modified their originals whenever they felt that the pagan features were objectionable and needed softening. Meagre as the sources are, many examinations have been made bearing on the subject, and on numerous points there is considerable agreement.

Unlike the Greeks and Romans ✓ the pagan Irish do not appear to have had a definite and well-ordered system of religious belief. The religion, which is commonly termed Druidism, recognized many gods, but no supreme god like Zeus or Jupiter. There was little or no prayer, and no settled form of worship. There were no temples, but it appears from a passage ✓ in Cormac's Glossary that there were altars of some kind erected to idols or to elemental gods, which must have been in the open air.

1. P.W.Joyce: Social History of Ancient Ireland---Page 220

2. Ibid--Page 221 (Cormac MacCullinan, famous annalist of 9th century)

Concerning the rites and doctrines of the Gaulish druids, accounts have been given by Caesar, and most students agree that his descriptions apply fairly closely to the Irish druids. W.G. Wood-Martin says: 1/ "The peculiar character of the Druidic organization precluded the existence of any very abnormal difference in the Druidism of Gaul, Great Britain, and Erin, --- there is, therefore, little in Caesar that might not be applied to Irish Druidism, as that religion is faintly depicted in alleged Irish manuscripts. "

According to Caesar, 2/ "The Druids never go to war, are exempted from taxes and military service, and enjoy all sorts of immunities. These mighty encouragements induce multitudes of their own accord to follow that profession.... they are taught to repeat a great many verses by heart, and often spend twenty years upon this institution; for it is unlawful to commit their statutes to writing..... They seem to follow this method for two reasons: (1) to hide their mysteries from the knowledge of the vulgar; and (2) to exercise the memory of their scholars, which would be apt to be neglected had they letters to trust to.... They teach likewise many things relating to the stars and their motions, the magnitude of the world and our earth; the nature of things, and the power and prerogatives of the immortal gods." They were known as wizards and magicians; they were poets, judges, teachers; they were the king's chief advisers, and they were very influential with the people.

Two things in the foregoing paragraphs are interesting for the purpose of a drama survey: the first is that there was no particular incentive for dramatic ritual in the pagan religion,

1. W.G. Wood-Martin: Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland--Page 249
 2. Caesar: Gallic Wars, VI--XIII--XVIII (Quoted by Wood-Martin)

since the system was loosely formed and uncentered. There were no great formal religious occasions such as the Dionysiac festivals of the Greeks, where pageantry and ritual could shade into dramatic conventions. The second point is that the druids, especially those of Gaul, made few written records of their ceremonies. Even if they were accustomed to making rude plays out of religious observances, the exact nature of these observances have never been disclosed to historians.

B. Fairs and Assemblies

Although most of the great assemblies of ancient Ireland paid due attention to religious practices, there is nowhere made any reference to play-making. The gatherings ~~had~~ had their origin in Funeral Games, and were held near ancient pagan cemeteries. Important national and local business was transacted, laws were made, disputes settled, taxes levied---but there were no playwrights to honor the gods.

The "aenach" or fair provided a variety of amusement, but it did not take the form of mummery or drama. The Fair of Tailteann (to be mentioned again later) was attended from all parts of Ireland and was noted particularly for its athletic games, corresponding with the Greek Olympic Games.

It is a curious fact that in all the list of entertainments at the fairs, there is no mention made of dancing. Here, again, was lost an element that entered prominently into the drama of other early societies. The dance was very important in the Greek plays, but evidently the Irish did not dance to music at all. Eugene O'Curry, a prominent historian, says, ~~As far as I have ever read,~~

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1. P.W. Joyce--Social History of Ancient Ireland--Page 220
 2. Eugene O'Curry: Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish--Page 406

there is no reference that can be identified as containing a clear allusion to dancing in any of our really ancient Irish MS. books."

III. Retarding of the theater by the Bards

A. Description of Bardic Schools

Another reason for the late development of Irish drama is to be found in the activities of the bardic school. This peculiar and powerful institution went far toward satisfying the instinctively dramatic nature of the Celt. ~~V~~^I/A bard, or storyteller, was a ~~man~~ of great consequence. He was a confidant of the king, and had the power to save from arrest temporarily any of his friends who might be in trouble. He was not permitted, when he went forth on a journey, to lodge in any but the noblest houses. His regular income was twenty-one cows and their grass in the territory of the king, besides food for himself, and for twenty-four attendants, two dogs, and six horses. He was called a bard, a ^{file}, or an ollamh, according to the number of years he had spent studying. An ordinary bard studied seven years, a ^{file} twelve. The highest rank, that of ollamh, included some of the greatest scholars and poets of the race.

The student started by learning the simpler poems, and the rudiments of law and philosophy. Then he learned more complicated tales, and the art of composition. After seven years he became a practicing bard. If he continued, he became a ^{file} or ollamh by studying magic and incantations, the legends of the kings, the more difficult forms of verse, and the intricacies of law. When he received the rank of ollamh, he had the right to wear the cloak of crimson and yellow feathers, and to carry the golden rod of office.

He was deemed competent to advise kings, judge peoples, and preserve the histories of his country. After the Christians had taught widely the art of writing, the file and the ollanb became less important as preservers of tradition. But the ordinary bards became popular, and served as story-tellers to the great mass of the people.

✓ 1. "Though the kings and war-like tribes regarded strife and conquest as the chief end of existence, the bardic class was to a considerable extent relieved from martial duties."

The literary artist had to be familiar with about three hundred and fifty tales, besides many poems. The tales were divided into various classes: Destructions of fortified places, cattle-raids, courtships or wooings, battles, tragical deaths, feasts, adventures in the fairy world, eulogues, and visions. These tales had to be arranged in succession, and harmonized in a historical sequence.

The art of recitation was very highly developed, and the bards were masters of eloquence and dramatic effect. They fully realized the power of the spoken word, and their stories were delivered so as to bring out all the possibilities of the stirring old epics. Yet, so far as can be ascertained, the bards made no deliberate attempt to unite in acting out the stories.

After the bards and shanachies declined in importance, the politicians partly took their place in supplying drama to the people, according to the implication of A.E. Malone:

✓ 2. "In a way these speeches of the politicians, particularly during the nineteenth century, gave to the people all the artistic entertainment which they could either secure or understand; and

1. Standish O'Grady: Selected Essays and Passages--Page 84
2. Andrew E. Malone: The Irish Drama---Page 6-7

the politician had to compete with the travelling circus as a purveyor of popular entertainment. Since the bards recited no more, and the shanachies read only the weekly newspapers where they survived at all, the orator in the market-place had to take the places of both in an effort to supply instructive recreation to the populace. He had to give his audience an emotional thrill, or be rated a failure."

The bard was essentially a one-man theater. It is strange that out of his art there did not grow a native drama. The bardic literature of Ireland is a magnificent storehouse for dramatic plots, and it is no more mythological than early Greek epics and romances, from which sprang the great Athenian drama.

B. Description of bardic literature

A short account of the material contained in the bardic stories will indicate the richness of the field that was almost unexploited for the purpose of the stage until the end of the nineteenth century. Out of folk-lore, legend, and chronicle the early Irish bards wove a tremendous fabric, part truth, part fancy. Whether or not this national record is a dependable source for the student of history, it is certainly an exciting description of glorious characters, of mighty battles, of heroic passions.

Had the Irish genius been bent to stage presentation rather than to bardic recitation, dramas as great as those of Greece might have resulted. Indeed, Standish O'Grady, the well-known historian of the late nineteenth century (whose opinion must be discounted because of his biased and intense patriotism) goes so far as to say: ✓ "I cannot help regarding

I. O'Grady: Selected Essays and Passages--Page 88

this age [the Red Branch] and the great personages moving therein as incomparably higher in intrinsic worth than the corresponding ages in Greece. In Homer, Hesiod, and the Attic poets there is a polish and artistic form, absent in the existing monuments of Irish heroic thought, but the gold, the pure ore itself, is here massier and more pure, the sentiment deeper and more tender, the audacity and freedom more exhilarating, the reach of imagination more sublime, the depth and power of the human soul more fully exhibit themselves."

Bardic literature is usually divided into three cycles or parts, the first of which is the mythological cycle dealing with prehistoric invaders of Ireland, and especially with Caesair, the grand-daughter of Noah. Forty days before the Flood, she came to Ireland with her husband, Fintan. When the Flood reached Ireland, all the company were drowned except Fintan, who was saved by a miracle and lived on in Ireland until 600 A.D. He was regarded as having great supernatural powers and was much deferred to by story-tellers. This cycle also treats of the followers of Partolon, the battles between the Nemedians and Formorians, and the invasions of the Fir Bolgs, who were descendants of Nemedian refugees who had fled to Greece. The Fir Bolgs ruled in peace until they were attacked and made subjects by the Tuatha de Danaan, who were also descendants of the Nemedians, and had returned from the Scandinavian countries where they had fled after the battles with the Formorians. The Tuatha ruled the country for nearly two hundred years, after which they were attacked by the Milesians from Spain. After their defeat the Tuatha lived under the hills and green mounds, where, it was believed, they had great palaces and piles of

wealth. From their strange refuge they could emerge to take part in the affairs of mortal men.

The second great cycle was the Ulster, or Red Branch, concerned chiefly with the exploits of Cuchulain (or Cu Chullin). This hero was the son of Dechtire, sister of King Conchobar, who ruled in Ulster about the beginning of the Christian era. Other great figures treated here are: Conall Cernach, a friend of Cuchulain; Fergus mac Roigh, who had been tricked by Conchobar and had joined the forces of Queen Maeve of Connacht; Deirdre and the sons of Usnach, whose story is a favorite with Irish writers.

The third cycle is the Ossianic, which contains stories in prose and verse concerning the followers of Finn and his son Oisín (Ossian) who is regarded as a bard of the same importance to the Celts as Homer is to the Greeks. This cycle is dated about 300 A.D.

Some of the Ossianic poems describe the battles of the Fenians (followers of Finn) against monsters and wizards, others are semi-humorous dialogues between St. Patrick and the pagan Ossian. The dialogues are quite dramatic in nature. Dr. Hyde says: "Even the reciters of the present day appear to feel this, and I have heard the censorious, self-satisfied tone of St. Patrick, and the querulous, vindictive whine of the starved old man Ossian reproduced with considerable humour by a reciter. But I think it nearly certain---though I cannot prove it---that in former days there was real acting and a dialogue between two persons, one representing the saint, and the other the old pagan. It was from a less promising beginning than this that the drama of Aeschylus

developed. But nothing could develop in later Ireland. Everything, time after time, was arrested in its growth. Again and again the tree of Irish literature put forth fresh blossoms, and before they could really expand they were nipped off. The conception of bringing together the Spirit of Paganism and of Christianity in the persons of the last great poet and warrior of the one, and the first great saint of the other, was truly dramatic in its conception, and the spirit and humour with which it has been carried out in the pieces which have come down to us are a strong presumption that under happier circumstances something greater would have developed from it. "

IV. Reasons for absence of drama up to 1100 A.D.

For three centuries and a half from the time of St. Patrick's labours in Ireland (432--461 A.D.) there was more of tranquillity and progress in Ireland than was enjoyed by the rest of Europe. Religion and learning was regarded highly. VI "In all the monastic schools Latin was taught; and since it was then the universal language of European learned men, there came in with it not only the Scriptures and books of devotion, but also all the learning of Europe." Fleeing from the barbarian hosts on the continent, scholars brought to Ireland a rich cultural addition. In the midst of a comparative peace it might be supposed that a native drama could arise. For several reasons, this did not occur in Ireland.

In the first place, the drama had ceased to exist either as an institution or as literature in western Europe, after the conversion of Constantine, and after the decline of the corrupted Roman drama. Even had the Irish been capable of emulating a continental stage, there was little that could serve as a model.

In the second place, the Irish, although they undertook in this period no great plundering raids across the seas, were considerably disturbed by internal wars. The numerous tribal states were often engaged in cattle-raiding forays which kept the country unsettled---usually the Irishman found plenty of drama in the defence of his property.

In the third place, the populace rarely settled within an area large enough to be called a town, and a thinly scattered agricultural population is usually not hospitable to the growth of the theater. The nearest approach to a town was the monastery. ✓ "In a land without towns in the modern sense the 'monastic cities' very populous and very busy, were active centres of life and thought, guardians both of corporate unity, of ancient tradition, and of new ideas of progress." In the shadow of these monasteries tradesmen and craftsmen took refuge, since they were exempt from military service. Perhaps, had there been a long enough period of peaceful development, there might have appeared something akin to the miracle and morality plays which were so enjoyed by the mediaeval workers of London.

✓2. "795 was the year in which the Scandinavian pirates, generally known as 'the Danes' though they were mostly Norse and Swedes, first appeared on the Irish coast, plundering the shrines of Rathlin". Thereafter these raids were occasional until the middle of the ninth century, when they threatened Europe from the Volga to the Shannon. Ireland suffered terribly from these invasions, which put an end to a glorious period in the nation's history--a period in which one unknown Irish poet was moved to write: "Three things that best support the world are: the slender stream of milk

from the cow to the pail, the slender blade of green corn upon the ground, the slender thread over the hand of a skilled woman."

With the birth of Brian Boru in 941 came a new force in the country's history. It was the mission of this great Irish king to recover the civilization of his people. ✓ "It is not impossible that the famous bardic schools of the middle ages owed their life, after the devastations of the pagan Foreigners, to the fostering care of Brian Boru." His efforts to break the power of the Scandinavians at last culminated in the battle of Clontarf on Good Friday, April 23rd, 1014.

After the expulsion of the Norsemen and the death of Brian Boru there were noticeable efforts made to bring all the warring chieftains under a single king. Schools and monasteries increased in number, and there was considerable literary activity. Yet, on the whole, the Irish were regarded on the continent as a barbarous race. They were cut off from European civilization, which came northward from the Mediterranean, and the idea of the democratic city-state had not reached them. The country continued to split into warring factions. Up to 1166, the reign was disputed between Munster and the North: then Turlough O'Connor of Connacht managed to win the High Kingship of Ireland, and was succeeded by his son, Rory O'Connor. In short, the government was of a loose-knit sort that the rest of Europe was slowly outgrowing.

Part Two

I. Miracle plays in Ireland

A. Historical sketch of the period

In 1170 the Earl of Pembroke, known as Strongbow, landed in Ireland with his mail-clad Normans and struck the first

blow in the Norman Conquest of Erin. With the approval of Adrian IV. and King Henry II. he claimed the country for the English crown. For the next two or three centuries the Irish records tell of considerable tumult and pillage in the country, although the rule of the Normans was in many ways beneficial. They fostered the growth of towns---and town-life meant more schools, commerce, wealth. It is to be noted, however, that the towns were the centers of an English culture in which the great masses of the poorer Irish could not participate. This fact has a bearing on the theater which will be apparent shortly.

✓1. "The fifteenth century brought to Ireland some-
more like material progress and prosperity than it had yet known...
It was the progress of a Gaelic-speaking Ireland under the rule
of Anglo-Norman lords." By 1541 all the important Gaelic chiefs
had admitted the sovereignty of the English King. ✓2. At a Parli-
ament held in Dublin in 1541, the Irish and Norman-Irish who at-
tended agreed to submit to Henry VIII and to renounce "the Bishop
of Rome."

B. Slight effect of church-drama

Naturally, a war-torn country is not favorably
disposed toward the development of a national drama, although this
alone is not sufficient to explain the absence of a mediaeval
theater in Ireland. It will be recollected that during the eleventh
and twelfth centuries the drama was being revived on the continent
in the form of liturgical plays which were sanctioned by the
clergy, and which served to make more attractive the church cere-
monies. Ireland, however, was cut off from these influences. Aside

1. Stephen Gwynn: History of Ireland---Page 123

2. Ibid---Page 145

from its geographic isolation, the church of Ireland was but loosely connected with Rome. ✓ "The Irish Church preserved to the tenth and eleventh centuries usages and customs which came down from the very earliest Christian times, long after they had been condemned and forbidden by Councils." It is probable that the popes of the twelfth century looked upon the Irish as rather uncertain champions of Christendom, since their warriors had not fought in the Crusades and were therefore outside the institution of chivalry.

Although Henry made no attempt to force Protestantism down the throats of the Irish, the close of his reign marks the beginning of a period made intensely bitter by religious controversy. So far as the theater is concerned, this religious battling is important, as it probably prevented the trade guilds from becoming Irish in outlook. Catholics were generally barred from membership and the guild became English in character. The miracle plays presented by the guild, therefore, won no serious regard from the natives. As A.E. Malone says: ✓ "The mystery and the miracle plays had no place in the life of Ireland; they were as unknown as the trope of an earlier age. The craft and the trade guilds which gave these early efforts at dramatic representation their important places in the drama of England had but small influence in Irish life at any time. They were not Irish---the Irish craftsman had an entirely different form of organization and regulation, something more akin to an artistic hierarchy than a trading body. The craft guilds came into Ireland from England, and their membership was composed mainly of people from England. These people

acted in their Irish guilds as their brethren acted in cognate guilds in England. In Dublin, and the few other Irish towns where guilds were established, they gave displays of the mysteries, evidently the same versions as were being acted in England."

There is very little information to be had concerning the production of miracle plays in Dublin. The following paragraph from a book by one S.C. Hughes throws a little light on the subject: V."In Dublin, as elsewhere, the drama began with religion. At Eastertide, in the fourteenth century, a miracle play was seen at the Church of S. John the Evangelist in Fishamble Street--than which only two older in the Empire are known by the Athenaeum Press, 1897. It deals with the Resurrection; and it is a well-developed play. It is surely striking to find it in Fishamble Street, near the scene of the glories of the Music Hall, and of Smock Alley theatre. Gilbert mentions a mystery at S. Patrick's in 1509. Mysteries, or moralities, appeared also at Hoggin Green before the Earl of Ossory in 1538."

II. Irish history in the days of Elizabethan drama

A. Disorder in politics detrimental to drama

Irish history in the days of Elizabeth is a record of one revolt after another against the tyranny of English overlords. The barbarous policies of the Virgin Queen in the last half of the century reduced Ireland to a state of extreme misery and privation. The people were kept so busy protecting their poor crops and fleeing from invaders that it is not strange they could give little attention to the drama--an institution which is de-

I. The Pre-Vistorian Drama in Dublin: S.C. Hughes----Page I.

pendent on a fairly well-fed population. Thus the glorious days of Shakespeare offered little cultural stimuli to Ireland.

B. Rebellions and reprisals

The activities of Shane O'Neill particularly incurred the wrath of Elizabeth. His life was spent in an effort to consolidate the warring factions of Ireland into an effective nationality, and he became so troublesome to England that at last Elizabeth's deputies invited him to a friendly banquet and cut off his head

This period was also marked by the rising of the second Geraldine League under the Earl of Desmond. A letter by one of the English leaders gives an idea of what a single day of this uprising was like:

✓ "We entered Conneloughe in two companies, Ormond toward the Shannon side and I upwards toward Newcastle, and marched all day without offence of any enemy, wasting and spoiling the country-....we left our camp guarded the next day, and searched some part of the mountain. There were slain that day, by the fury of the soldiers, above four hundred people, found in the woods, and wheresoever any house or corn was found, it was consumed by fire."

The uprisings of Hugh O'Neill and Red Hugh O'Donnell, ending at the battle of Kinsale in 1601, brought further terror upon Ireland. The gentle poet Spenser, who was acquainted with the Irish situation, describes some of the Irish refugees thus:

✓ 2. "Out of every corner of the woods and glynnes

1. The Indestructible Nation: P.S. O'Hegarty ----- Page 110-111
2. Ibid--quoted on Page 120-121

they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legges could not beare them; ghosts crying out of their graves: they did eat the dead carrions, happy where they could find them, yea, and one another soone after, insomuch as the very carcasses they spared not to scrape out of their graves, and if they found a plot of watercresses or shamrocks, these they flocked as to a feast for the time, yet not able long to continue there withall; that in short space there were none almost left, and a most populous and plentiful country suddainly left voyde of man and beast. "

As a method of subduing the country, Elizabeth continued the "plantations" which had been begun by Mary in Leix and Offaly. These plantations of English landlords in the midst of the Irish settlers occasioned a great deal of resentment and were a constant source of vicious oppression.

The foregoing paragraphs serve to indicate that in the war-torn Ireland of the sixteenth century there could be no growth of native drama. To be sure, other nations have managed to forge ahead culturally in times of war, but conditions were so peculiarly unfortunate in Ireland that progress was impossible.

III. Ireland in the 17th century

A. Historical sketch of the period

The plantations in Ulster, encouraged by King James (1610) were so profitable to the English adventurers that efforts were made elsewhere to wrest land from the native owners. Under Charles the First, Strafford, the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, tried it in Connaught, but his plans were interrupted by the fall of his king, and his own execution by Parliament. Stung by these continued plantations, the Catholic Irish rose under the leadership of O'More.

On October 23, 1641, they planned to take Dublin Castle and thus strike at the root of the English power; but, as has happened so many times, the assault on the Castle was a miserable failure. The Catholics, however, killed many Protestants in Ulster. Reprisals were made, of course, and ~~V~~"so began a war which lasted twelve years, and of which the consequences for evil are not yet exhausted. There were ferocious reprisals, made both by the Scots in Ulster and by the forces under the Lords Justices in Leinster. It is a horrible period to look back upon."

In 1649 a sort of peace was patched up between the Irish factions, but this was rudely broken when Cromwell landed in August, with the avowed purpose of settling the Irish question once and for all. He began by butchering three thousand people at Drogheda. For the next few years the stern hand of Puritan England fell upon the country, and until the return of Charles the Second there was horror in Ireland.

Charles did very little toward restoring to the Irish the land which had been confiscated by Cromwell. When James the Second came to the throne, however, ~~he~~ helped the Catholics and reversed the confiscations. When William of Orange landed in England, and James fled, Ireland became a battleground for two rival claimants for the throne of England. William had all of Protestant ^{IRELAND} on his side, and possession of England; James, supported by Catholic Ireland, had to depend on what France could send him by way of supplies and munitions. Then came the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, which meant the defeat of James.

In general, it is true that ~~V~~"Ireland, which

up to Elizabeth's day had always been described as a land of war, had two periods of peace in the seventeenth century--from 1603 to 1641, and again from 1660 to 1689."

B. The founding of the first Irish theater

Not much is known about the first theater in Ireland, but most writers on the subject agree that there was no regular theater in the country before 1635. The following account by John Eglinton seems to be as accurate as any:

✓ "In 1635, when the theaters [in England] were closed for a time owing to the plague, James Shirley came over to Dublin in order to help his friend Ogilby, Wentworth's Master of the Revels, in starting the new theater in Werburgh Street, the first theater founded outside London. Dublin was then, indeed, a Protestant town chiefly; but it had that necessity of a theater in those days, a court anxious to encourage one, while in the background was a population in which, whatever its indifference and ignorance, there was no such sullen antipathy to "stage-plays" as was paralyzing the English theater. Instead of a nation filled with hostility or indifference to the stage, there was a nation in which the drama might have a distinct part to play, both in conciliating and in educating the people.... For a special development of drama in Dublin there had been the necessary historical preparation. Besides the miracle plays which from an early period had been popular, the trade-guilds had accustomed the public to dramatic entertainments."

It should be noted from the above quotation that the theater-going public was centered in Protestant Dublin, and that therefore the Catholic masses of the people had no

sympathetic contact with the drama. The " necessary historical preparation" ----the miracle and trade-guild plays-- --were also peculiar to Dunlin. As far as the rest of the country was concerned, there was very little preparation of any sort.

Dublin itself felt only a cool interest in Shirley's efforts, and the enterprising manager complained to friends in London that he was having a difficult time pleasing his audiences. He stayed in the city about two years. One of his particular attempts to find the favor of the Irish was his production of the play "St. Patrick for Ireland."

The theme of this play, which contains much of the religious element which was left out of the plays of the English Reformation, is concerned with the conversion of Ireland to Christianity. The glory of St. Patrick, however, was less familiar to Dubliners than the story of St. George, which had been treated frequently in the trade-guild plays.

Eglinton says: ✓ "That St. George should not at least occasionally have given place to St. Patrick is the more to be regretted when we think of the real part which he was even then playing in native Irish literature, in those dialogues with Oisín, which might so naturally have been the starting point of a school of Irish drama. But except at the Castle, and perhaps at King's Inns, Dublin had seen nothing before Shirley's visit of what the mediaeval drama had grown into; and it is interesting to find that the first play which seems to have interested an Irish audience had in it something of the character of a miracle play."

Since Shirley was writing for a bigoted Protestant Anglo-Irish audience, he found it impossible to treat the character of St. Patrick with as much seriousness as he wished, and therefore the play, as a miracle play, was rather a failure.

V." Soon after, the Dublin theater was closed owing to the Rebellion. It is perhaps allowable to speculate on what the Irish campaign of the "last of the Elizabethans" might have led to had he been given a chance of following it up. Apparently, in order to interest the Irish people in the drama, he had found it necessary to make some appeal to national feeling....it is no stretch of probability to suppose that, having been successful with a Patrick play, he might have gone on to Strongbow, and that a definite school of Irish drama might have thus been started, which, although it might have had to wait till the foundation of the Abbey Theater, sooner or later would have recurred to that one neglected vein of Irish literature and legend awaiting dramatic development, the dialogues of Oisín and Patrick."

IV. Ireland in the 18th century

A. Historical sketch of the period

The history of Ireland during the Penal Days of the 18th century resembles that of the 17th century in that the masses of the people were treated with barbarous severity. During this period, also, a native drama could not have arisen, although there was a flourishing Anglo-Irish theater in Dublin and Cork, as shall be noted on subsequent pages.

The general policy of the English aimed at eliminating the Irish Catholics as a political and social force

John Eglinton: Anglo-Irish Essays----Page 66

in the country. All the higher church dignitaries were ordered to leave the country, and only registered priests could say Mass; thus great numbers of people were deprived of religious services except at rare occasions. Catholics were heavily taxed and excluded from public life.

V. The harsh Penal Laws ruined Irish trade, with a subsequent distress that impoverished whole countryside. Adverse legislation spoiled the trade in wool, cotton, glass, fish, and linen. The Irish Parliament of the 18th century was "unrepresentative even of the majority of the population which it professed to represent. It was corrupt, through the methods of election, the nature of the constituencies, and the facilities afforded by its constitution for the bribery, direct and indirect, of its members."

By 1760, when George II died and his grandson, George III, took the throne, many of these Penal Laws were not enforced. Nevertheless the country at this time was in poor condition. There had been several famines, waves of emigration had drained some of the best men from the country, secret societies were committing outrages in every part of the country. In 1775 the American colonies, on the brink of revolution, excluded Irish linen from their country.

In 1793 England, dismayed by the new French Republic, awoke to the fact that her colonies should be treated fairly, and made notable concessions to the Catholics.

This meant a general advance in prosperity, especially in Dublin, where the arts flourished. This period was brought to a close by the Rebellion of 1798, which was started by the United

I. Mary Hayden and G.A. Moonan: A Short Hist. of the Irish People

Irishmen under Lord Edward Fitzgerald. The abortive revolution of Robert Emmet in 1803 was a result of the continued activities of this society. Exhausted by the bloodshed of '98, the Irish were tricked into a Union with England---a Union which they were to regret, and were to try to break for the next 120 years.

B. Gaelic literature of the 18th century

I. ✓ "The desolating peace of the Penal times was a more sinister peril to Irish literature than had been any of the devastating wars of invasion or spoliation that had plagued the country. Legislation which struck directly at mind and character was more deadly than the sword. With education denied to an entire people, and teaching made a criminal offence, there seemed to be little hope of literary activity. The great mass of people belonged to the prescribed faith, and they were also Gaelic speakers, so that their language was penalized equally with their religion. Most of the people had to depend on the learning they could obtain from the 'hedge-schools'. These seats of study, conducted---also in defiance of the law---by teachers with a price upon their heads, were the surviving representatives of the great scholastic establishments of earlier times." Oppression was so open that even a man like Jonathan Swift, who had no love for the Irish, was moved to write the famous "M.B. Drapier" papers to the Irish press.

In the following account of the theater of Ireland in the 18th century, it must be remembered that most of the dramatic fare was served to English and Anglo-Irish in the large cities, and that conditions in the country at large were quite different from the gay life of the capital.

C. The Irish theater of the 18th century

1. MOLLOY'S STATEMENT

In speaking of the Irish theater of the 18th century, J. Fitzgerald Molloy says: ^{1/} "To a people emotional and dramatic, picturesque, vivid, and imaginative by temperament, the theater was a center of attraction, and an object of interest, a familiar and delightful place whose fortunes concerned them, whose productions occupied them, whose players were as familiar friends. The stage was not less to them than it had been to the Greeks of an earlier day; that gracious race whose spirit they shared if not inherited." In another place he says, ^{2/} that we should examine Irish drama as the central object in a picture of 18th century Dublin "at a time when the joyousness of existence was unstifled by the hardships of poverty; when life was a thing to love and hold light."

Interesting as his description of the theater of this period may be, Molloy gives a wrong impression in the above quotations. It is ridiculous to say that the drama meant as much to the Irish as it did to the Greeks---in the latter country it was a living institution supported by a happy and enlightened audience; in Ireland it was a feeble graft from the drama of England, enjoyed only by a small minority. His statement that "life was unstifled by the hardships of poverty" will be disproved by the most casual inquiry into Irish history. Although Molloy persists in discussing the Irish stage as if it were a national institution, the present writer is greatly indebted to his book, and draws much of his information from it.

1. J. Fitzgerald Molloy: Romance of the Irish Stage---Page 2

2. Ibid----Page 26

2. Smock Alley Theater

In December, 1701, an accident happened to Smock Alley Theater, one of the most active of the playhouses of 18th century Ireland. Those who were of a practical turn said that the galleries had fallen because of weak supports, but all good Christians knew that they had met with the fury of heaven because of the production of Shadwell's Libertine, a very loose play.

The manager at that time was Joseph Ashbury, a Londoner who had come to Ireland with the Duke of Ormond, who made him Master of the Revels. He got together a fair company, most of them hired in London, and began his management in 1692 with a very satisfactory performance of Othello. He was Master of the Revels under Charles II, James II, William III, Queen Anne, and George I. He was succeeded in 1726 by his son-in-law, Thomas Elrington.

Smock Alley, the thoroughfare after which this famous old theater ^{was called,} received its name in the following manner, according to Chetwood, one of the earliest historians of the Irish stage: ✓ "The proper Name is Orange Street; but it took the Apellation of Smock Alley from Mother Bungy, of infamous Memory, and was, in her Days, a Sink of Sin; but a Man being found murder'd in these bottomless Pits of Wickedness, the Sheds were pulled down by the Populace, the unclean Vermin were banished, the Place purged of its Infamy."

3. MADAME VIOLANTE

✓ "Whilst Smock Alley Theatre was entertaining its patrons with such plays as Cato; King Richard the Third,
 "a tragedy written by the famous Shakespeare"; Alexander the Great;
The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub; The Man of Mode, and the comedies of the witty George Farquhar, a student at Trinity College,

a French lady named Madame Violante came to town in 1727, and without further ado hired a fine residence in Fownes Court that had once been occupied by the Lord Chancellor Whitchel. This house was not only uncommonly roomy, but possessed a spacious yard which was converted into a booth where a first-class company of rope-dancers, swordsmen, and tumblers exhibited themselves to the delight of the town for some time. The Lady herself, though no longer young, and never beautiful, tripped about her stage in an amazing way."

Chetwood gives the following quaint description of the lady and her entertainments: it differs slightly from Molloy's account:

✓ "In the year 1732, a Theatrical Booth was erected by Mrs. Violante an Italian Lady, celebrated for her Strength and Agility, a qualification that does not render the Fair Sex the least more amiable; the Strength of the Limbs, which these Sort of Undertakers expose, in my Opinion, is shockingly indecent; but hers were masculinely indecent, and were of such a Piece with the Features of her Face. I am informed, the shewing her Limbs did not meet with the Success in this Kingdom, as she had found in her elder Sister, England; that Lady's children delight in such Entertainments: Bull-baiting, Boxing, Bear-garden, and Prize-fighting, will draw to them all Ranks of People, from Peer to the Pedlar---but to Mademoiselle Violante. She, finding her Tumbling tiresome, fell into Playing and Pantomime (another Disgrace to the Drama) Mr. Barrington, Mr. John Morris, and, I think, Mr. Beamfly, Miss Woffington, Miss Mackay and many others, came under her Directions, and played several Pieces with Grotesque Entertainments, till stopt by the Lord

Mayor of the City of Dublin; Mrs. Violante having no Sanction, or Proper Authority, to exhibit such Entertainments. The Place is put to another Use." It became a hospital for "Indigent Lying-in Women." The Dublin Intelligence, commenting on Madame Violante, gives the date of her arrival in Dublin as 1729.

The above quotations give an idea of the turbulency of the theater in the first half of the 18th century. Conditions in Dublin, particularly as to theater construction, stage design, and acting facilities, were much like those in England during the closing days of Restoration drama.

After the novelty of her clowning had ceased to attract customers, Madam Violante turned to the production of farce. Gay's Beggar's Opera was very popular at that time, so she produced it with children as players. Its great success was due in large part to the ability of Peg Woffington as Polly. It was here that the woman who was destined to be one of the greatest actresses of the century served her apprenticeship.

#. Rivalry between Dublin theaters

Despite the appearance of a new music hall in Crow Street, which opened with a ridetto in 1731, Smock Alley continued to be the city's principal playhouse. Shortly afterwards, however, three young players named Luke Sparks, John Barrington, and Miss Mackay rented Madame Violante's booth and set out to produce some of Farquhar's comedies. The managers of Smock Alley thereupon persuaded the Lord Mayor to close the house of this new rival. The opposition to this move aroused the townspeople, and they subscribed money for the erection of a new playhouse in

a part of the city which was outside the jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor---namely, on Rainsford Street. In 1734 another theater was opened in Aungier Street, with Farquhar's Recruiting Officer as the first offering.

During the next few years the Dublin theaters underwent many vicissitudes in their efforts to capture the patronage of the fickle audiences. There was a particularly bitter rivalry between Smock Alley and Aungier Street. In the summer these two theaters sought the favor of country audiences, one going north, the other south. The winter of 1739 was so cold that the theaters were temporarily closed. Many people were frozen to death and countless others starved. Smock Alley tried to keep open, and according to the Dublin Evening Post its manager ✓ "Has erected in the pit (Which he designs to continue during the frost) a fire engine in which is kept a large fire burning the whole time of the performance, and warmed the house in such a manner as gave great satisfaction to the audience."

5. Audiences in the 18th century

The audiences of this period were tumultuous and disorderly. The population of the city was about 150,000--- enough to give fair support to the few theaters. The unguarded streets were often unsafe for peace-loving people. Robbers, beggars, drunkards, and quarrelsome gallants thronged the picturesque streets. The pillory was often in use; occasionally women were burned for the murder of their infants. Club-houses were numerous, and here wealthy men gambled, drank, and duelled. Spectacles, processions, and street fights were common. In such a gay, dissipated -----
I. J. Fitzgerald Molloy----Romance of the Irish Stage--quoted on

capital the theater, of course, was often the center of exciting scenes, Riots within the playhouses were by no means infrequent, and on several occasions it was positively dangerous for certain actors to appear on the boards.

6. Important players of the times

The best-known performers of the day were Peg Woffington, James Quin (who had played at the Drury Lane in London) Kitty Clive (who numbered among her friend such men as Henry Fielding, George Farquhar, Horace Walpole, and Doctor Johnson) Susanna Cibber, the daughter of old Colley Cibber. In 1742 David Garrick appeared on the Dublin stage. In 1743 the character of Richard III was played at Smock Alley by an unannounced young man who was later to figure prominently in Dublin theatricals---Thomas Sheridan. Other famous performers were Spranger Barry, who first appeared in 1744 as the leading man in Othello, and Miss Bellamy, who played Desdemona to Sheridan's Othello in 1745.

7. Thomas Sheridan and his efforts

During the season of 1745, both Smock Alley and Aungier Street were almost ruined by the inefficiency of the managers. By public request they asked Sheridan to take sole charge of the stage. He accepted the task, and proceeded to make some very necessary reforms in the theater. The difficulties were tremendous, and Sheridan met them with courage and tact.

The actors were indifferent about rehearsals; indeed, the principals regarded it as a favor when they presented themselves at all. The infrequent rehearsals were attended by large groups of roistering students and noisy gallants, and, as a result

of poor preparation, the plays were often clumsily performed. The stage properties were usually shabby, and the costumes worn and soiled.

✓ I. "Frequently it happened that whilst the pit was half empty and but a single row of the gallery was filled, over a hundred men of quality, students, bloods, and coffee-house critics invaded the stage; mixing with the players so as to be scarcely distinguished from them, lounging at the entrances and exits of the actors, or congregating in the background, where they passed free-and-easy comments on the performances, or otherwise hindered it by exchanging greetings across the stage or with their friends in the boxes.... The fact that every idler with a laced coat and a sword, that every stripling who had acquaintance with the actors and could afford a shilling bribe, or any bully who could rap out an oath and flourish an oak sapling, was sure to gain admission behind the scenes. The upper gallery was a source of vexation and terror to the poor players. To this part of the house the liveried chair-bearers and footmen were free to resort whilst they waited for their employers; and here also the public gained entrance by the payment of twopence. As accomodation was limited, the crush on certain nights was great; those who paid admission resented the presence of those who had free admission, whereon fights followed that deafened the house and frequently interrupted the performance."

Sheridan instituted new rules which raised the efficiency of the actors, insisted on punctuality at rehearsals, dressed the characters in appropriate costumes, paid salaries regularly on Saturday nights, and discouraged the presence of gallants on the stage.

Sheridan continued as manager until 1758, when he became definitely discouraged in his attempt to please the volatile, rowdy audiences. He had succeeded, however, in bringing to the capital a number of fine performers who had lent brilliance to Dublin's theaters. Among these were Mrs. Bland, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Macklin. Theophilis Cibber, West Digges, Henry Mossop, James Robertson, and Tom King.

8. The Barry-Mossop rivalry

In 1757 a group of subscribers headed by Spranger Barry prepared to raze the Crow-Street music hall and erect a new theater on the site. Sheridan quickly prepared to meet this opposition and printed a pamphlet stating "The Case of the Proprietors of the United Theaters of Aungier Street and Smock Alley" which was given to all the members of Parliament. Despite the eloquent plea that the city could not support another theater, Crow Street was opened and enjoyed a fine season. Then Sheridan withdrew and Henry Mossop took over the management of Smock Alley. The rivalry between Mossop and Barry continued season after season, with slight advantage to either.

In a letter dated from Dublin, November 18, 1763, Macklin, writing to his daughter, says; V. "Never were there greater theatrical contests than at present, nor were parties among the ladies higher; insomuch as they distinguished themselves by the names of Barryists and Mossopians---pantomimes and dancing are two good auxiliaries to Barry; and Saunders the wire-dancer, and Macklin's acting in the farces of great benefit to Mossop. Barry is determined to play the same plays as Mossop does in order that the town may

judge of the merit of the performers."

In 1767 Barry was forced out of the competition and Mossop enjoyed a monopoly until some of his own company deserted him and started a new theater in Capel Street. The stage was in a miserable condition now; by 1773 Mossop had followed Barry into a pathetic bankruptcy.

During the last few years of the century the Irish theater was in a constant state of tumult and change. Smock Alley and Crow Street alternately tasted of prosperity, until at last, in 1790 Smock Alley went out of business and was converted into a storehouse for whiskey and flour. Later, a church dedicated to St. Michael and St. John was erected on the site. 1793 marked the building of a new theater in Fishamble Street.

V. Ireland in the 19th century

A. Historical sketch of 19th century Ireland

For the first fifteen years of the 19th century there was a revival of trade and agriculture in Ireland because of England's demand for foodstuffs in the war with Napoleon. But in 1821 and 1822 the crops failed and there was distress everywhere. In 1823 Daniel O'Connell founded the Catholic Association, by which agitation was carried on to repeal the Union.

✓ I. In 1841, "Ireland had over eight millions of people. They had increased by at least three millions in forty years, and a terrible proportion of these millions lived always on the verge of starvation. O'Connell had immense numbers behind his movement, and need drove them to support any leaders from whom they could

hope for relief." Repeal meetings were held, and one at Tara is said to have attracted half a million people.

In 1845-6, the potato crop failed, and people died in thousands. In 1848 there was a short-lived rebellion against England, led by the Young Irelanders, a fiercely nationalist group. After the famine began a series of emigrations which deprived Ireland of thousands of her ablest and most scholarly men--men who might have been instrumental in fostering a national drama had their lives been safe.

Except in industrial Ulster, the Irish remained impoverished until 1879, when hope was aroused by the formation of the Land League under Parnell, a league which proposed to restore their lands to the dispossessed Irish owners. Parnell became the foremost figure in Irish politics, and forced Gladstone, the Prime Minister, to offer certain relief measures. Parnell's efforts to gain Home Rule for the country were halted by a scandal in his personal life. But in 1903 was passed the Wyndham Land Purchase Act which was designed to transfer all the land of Ireland from landlords to tenants, who were to pay for it in instalments. Once more the Irish were at least nominally the owners of their land.

A significant event, as far as this survey is concerned, occurred in 1893 when the Gaelic League was founded by Douglas Hyde, Eoin MacNeill, and others. None of the older nationalists had attached much importance to the preservation and spread of the native language. But the younger writers did; they felt that a separate language should be spoken. By 1900 the Gaelic League

was very strong, and increased the numbers of those who read and spoke the Irish tongue. The importance of this increase will be indicated in another place.

B. Irish drama in the first half of the 19th century

The type of plays which the Irish enjoyed in the first half of the 19th century were pallid copies of a decadent English theater; therefore it is worthwhile to examine briefly the causes of the decline of the English stage in this period. According to Allardyce Nicoll, the decline was caused partly by over-large theaters, where the distance of the stage from the pit and galleries $\sqrt{\quad}$ "Rendered subtle acting impossible and forced the performers to indulge in rant and bombast. It is not mere fancy to argue this as one of the main causes of dramatic decay. Contemporaries were unanimous in declaiming against these lofty structures. Mrs. Siddons herself, we are told, made her inflections coarser and rougher; the flash of repartee was impossible; the tender whispers or the excited aside were rendered ridiculous by the necessity which lay upon the actors to shout, if their words were to carry to the topmost galleries.... Hence the rise and popularity of the spectacular play.... The words of the theater mattered little so long as the plot was crudely indicated and plenty of opportunity given to the manager to devise attractive scenes and ensembles.... It was probably the size of these theaters which served to intensify the evils of the audience. Society was libertine and vulgar, and the upper-class people set a tone in the playhouses which was aped among the more dissolute of the bourgeoisie. "

Theater conditions in 19th. century Ireland may be estimated from the following quotation, which includes a little of the history of the theaters in Cork:

✓1. "Probably the first theater built in Cork was one which stood, early in the last century 18th. in Drury Lane, off the North Main Street. Another was afterwards run up in Broad Lane, but had ceased to exist before 1736. In that year a regular theater was opened at the corner of George Street and Prince's Street, but it was only a small place. In 1760 the 'Theater Royal', in George's Street was built and opened under the management of Spranger Barry. In 1840 this theatre was accidentally burned down. In 1850 a circus was built by a man named Pablo Fanque on the site of that old theater. A short time afterwards this circus was transformed into a theatre....

✓2. I am afraid the stock company very often went without their salaries...for in those days it was quite as hard to draw the Cork public as it has been ever since....✓3. Yet though we have had so many great actors in Cork, it must be confessed that the theater in Cork has never been a paying concern. It seems to me that this has been so always, for some time ago I came across an old Cork paper--- printed I think in 1820-- in which I read a very bitter complaint of the inadequate support given to the local theater, and it stated that a fine company of opera singers brought down by the manager of the Hawkins Street Theater in Dublin were playing to almost empty benches."

1. J.W.Flynn: The Random Recollections of an Old Playgoer, Guyand Co. Cork, 1890---Page 7.

2. Ibid:---Page 11.

3. Ibid---Page 25

An indignant letter to the Dublin Inquisitor for March, 1821, gives a further description of conditions:

V. Sir,

Happening to go to the Theatre half an hour early the other evening, I fell into a reflection on the variety of performances that are presented nightly to the spectators that assemble there. It was in vain I endeavored to reconcile their inconsistencies in the reflection that all was designed for public amusement, and should not be scanned too closely---still the idea of absurdities and improbabilities stole on me, and at length I declared open war against the stage and the actors I have drawn up a catalogue of the names of the various classes of pieces, and it may amuse some of your readers to look at it. First, there is Tragedy and Comedy, the legitimate heads of all the rest, from which every other representation is drawn, and that furnishes an inexhaustible fund for imitation; Opera is next-- this species is so frequently diversified, and assumes such a variety of features, that I own I am often at a loss whether it properly belongs to Tragedy or to Comedy; it is sometimes gay, sometimes tragic, sometimes ludicrous, and sometimes simple; to this follows what is called a Musical Play-- to this a Drama--next a Farce in the old way, such as Murphy's Citizen, and a Farce in the new way, such as X.Y.Z., for they are both distinct. Next a Melodrama, and a Serious Pantomime---a Ballet, and a Grand Spectacle--then there's an Operatic Melo Drama, and a comic Extravaganza--an Interlude and a Burletta--then there's a serio-comico-farcical-laughable Burlesque---all of which are widely different--in short I believe I could run on a couple of pages with my -----
Dublin Inquisitor---March 1821 Page 82-84

enumeration, but fear the detail would become tedious. Now, Mr. Editor, what conclusion must we draw from all this?.... a playgoing friend of mine frequently brings his young wife to the pit--I've seen them both wiping their eyes, and heard them sobbing loudly when Douglas was dying in the arms of Lady Randolph---a few minutes afterward she was not far removed from hystericks with violent laughing at Kitty's minuet in "High life below stairs". What do you say to this?--was not this an instance of that exquisite sensibility that, like the chameleon, takes the shade from that which is around it?. What a soul must he have who can weep with the unfortunate, grin with the ridiculous, and laugh with the merry, within one short half-hour!"

Yours, etc.

A Subscriber "

In a copy of a Dublin paper of Feb. 9, 1880 appears the following item:

✓ I. "The Theater Royal was completely destroyed by fire this afternoon. The fire is still burning, and several adjoining houses are threatened with destruction....the theatre was the immediate successor of the celebrated Crow street Theater--it has seen within its walls the most distinguished in every branch of histrionic art...On the "Command Night", so called from the performance being commanded by the Lord Lieutenant, who attended in full state with his staff and household and their wives, the scene presented could not be equalled....Dublin is more heavily garrisoned than any other town in the British dominions...and when, on

Command Nights, the officers of these different corps, for whom it

I. The History of the Theater Royal, Dublin--Published by Edward Ponsonby, Dublin, 1870---The newspaper here quoted is pasted on the inside cover of the book

is de rigeur to be present, were gathered within the theatre walls, their varied uniforms of blue and scarlet, and rival scarfs of mixed embroideryⁿ, made a glorious sight to see... The unenviable distinction of having been the noisiest theatre in the world will be readily accorded to the Theatre-Royal... the top gallery, familiarly known as "the circle of the gods" was wont to be filled with undergraduates from the university... if one of their number made his appearance in the dress-circle, arrayed in swallow-tail and white necktie, he was made the subject of playful and unfeeling remarks by his friends in the upper tier... When the curtain was down, the students enacted uproarious interludes; at times singing in full chorus of about three or four hundred voices.... On one memorable occasion a time-honored Dublin joke received a new commentary; they stuffed a dummy straw man and smuggled it past the ticket taker. Between the acts a furious mock struggle was got up around the dummy, with sticks brandished and yells of "Throw him over". The pit began to grow seriously alarmed, for, unlike Danae, they were not anxious to have a god showered into their laps. When the struggle was at its height and the straw man about to be launched on his airy flight, one of the boys, or "men", as they insisted on being called, yelled, "Don't waste him! Kill a fiddler with him."ⁿ Amid a deafening roar from the whole house, the flimsy fabric was thrown over; but it resolved itself into a shower of straw and cast-off clothes in the fall, and nobody was hurt."

Such was the temper of the 19th century audience. Since the drama itself was of a mediocre quality, the audience helped to fill out an eventful evening.

The over-sized theaters, the poor quality of the performances, and the rudeness of the spectators turned many potential dramatists to closet drama ~~and~~ dramatic poetry. Others found self-expression in novels. Thus men were l~~st~~ to the stage who might have glorified it---men like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Tennyson, and Browning.

It is also probable that the strict censorship of plays in an age when young dramatists wished to be revolutionaries was a less important reason for the decline of the theater. In addition, a new reading public which was devoted to novel-reading was growing up.

Nicoll remarks further: ^{1/} The realm of tragedy in the late years of the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th century showed a miserable paucity of tragic endeavor...Of no single drama can we say, 'Here is a work the writing of which called forth the author's whole strength and innermost being.' Romantic melodramas were also sorry affairs, and comedy showed a decided degeneracy.

C. Dion Boucicault

Into the unexciting Irish theater of the '40's stepped a colorful and important playwright in the person of ^{2/} Dion Boucicault. He was born in 1822, probably the natural son of Dr. Dionysus Lardner. His first appearance on the stage was under the name of Lee Moreton in the part of Sir Giles Overreach in Massinger's A New Way To Pay OLD DEBTS. His first Irish part was as Rory O'More in Samuel Lover's dramatization of his own novel.

1. Allardyce Nicoll: British Drama ----Page 307

2. Townsend Walsh: The Career of Dion Boucicault (Biographical facts taken from brochure published in New York by Dunlap Society, 1915.)

Boucicault mad his first big success with his London Assurance in 1841. He first acted under his own name in 1852, taking the title role in his own play The Vampire. In 1860 he produced The Colleen Bawn from The Collegians, a novel by Gerald Griffin. This was the first of the long line of romantic Irish dramas. His first appearance in an Irish theater was with his wife at the Theater Royal, Hawkins Street, Easter Monday, 1861.

His well-known play Arrah-na-Pogue was produced at the Theater Royal, November 4, 1864. The play is particularly noted because of its revival of the old street ballad "The Wearing of the Green," dating from 1798.

Another popular play, The Shaughraun, is believed to have netted Boucicault over 500,000 dollars. It was founded on an episode in the Fenian insurrection of 1866. It was so well received that he tried to use it as an argument in getting Disraeli to release all Irish political prisoners then in English jails.

Several of his Irish plays were first produced in Boston---namely, Finn MacCool at the Hollis Theater on Feb. 3rd, 1887, and Cushla Machree at the Hollis on Feb. 20, 1888.

Nicoll has this to say of the man's craftsmanship: V "Then came Dion Boucicault, the great force in melodramatic drama from the 40's of the century to the time of his death in 1890. Boucicault is a master of the theater, if he is not a great dramatist. No one knew better than he how to weave into a single play those elements of sentimentalism, humor, wit, and excitement

which have ever charmed unthinking audiences. He has no

inventive power. All his incidents are abstracted from previous works of drama or fiction; but no one possessed to his degree this constructive skill. His characters are stereotyped, villains being villains and heroes heroes, but that was made necessary because of his aim---the subordination of character to what always proves of more immediate interest, the development of a stirring story. Yet Boucicault has certain positive virtues. Much as he may have aided in the retarding of the true advance of the drama, he showed to other playwrights many secrets of their craft. His method of dealing with his materials is masterly, and his dialogue is essentially dramatic. Indeed, at times, that dialogue becomes almost inspired with a naturalism and raciness long forgotten by playwrights contented to provide would-be dignified but bathetic conversations in the "high-falutin" tone. "

A.E. Malone says of Boucicault: ✓ "In the plays of Dion Boucicault the Irish people found what they could never find in the plays of Tom Robertson [regarded by English critics as the dramatist who brought "realism" to the English stage] They found color, romance, high-sounding words, deeds of daring, and the spirit of sacrifice. Those who may be disposed to sneer in a condescending way at Boucicault's plays would do well to examine them and take note of the care with which they are constructed. The well-made play for which American critics examine the work of Scribe and Sardou can be examined more domestically in the work of Boucicault, if they will but take the trouble to examine it. It is easy to laugh at his melodrama; but look how carefully he works for his effects, and how well he achieves them!"

Even though Boucicault's plays are deficient in some ways, he succeeded in drawing Irish audiences into the theater with portrayals of characters and situations with which they could feel some sympathy. J.W. Whitebread and other dramatists learned from him how to write patriotic melodramas which were popular up to the World War. Although they were not realistic, and the characters were "stage Irishmen" far removed from the real Irishman, these plays were national in mood and purpose, and glorified heroes like Wolfe Tone, Rapper Dandy, Robert Emmet, and Lord Edward Fitzgerald. ✓ "They were poor plays, mainly melodramas of the most vivid kind, but they made history real for many thousands of people."

Part Three

I. The Irish Dramatic Revival

A. Formation of the Gaelic League

✓ "After Parnell had been deserted and vilified by those who should have been his most ardent and constant supporters the bottom seemed to fall out of Irish life. Then it was that attention was turned to those cultural movements which have since remade the life of the country. The Gaelic League was founded, and the Irish Literary Society. Standish O'Grady published his history of Ireland, and John O'Leary enthused his youthful followers with his high mind and deep feeling... Thus the minds of the younger men were turned from politics to literature, and the Irish Literary Renaissance began."

Since the story of the Irish dramatic revival is so well-known, the present writer will attempt to give only the important outlines of the movement.

B. Formation of the Irish Literary Theatre

After 1883 came the growth of Irish Literary Societies in London and Dublin. (1) "The purpose of these Societies was to foster the growth of a new and distinctively Irish literature in English, and to that end it organized lectures and discussions on Irish literary topics, aided the publication of the work of neglected Irish writers, and gave opportunities to the younger writers who were striving to have themselves heard."

The effect of these societies in stimulating Irish writers, especially playwrights, was immediately felt. In 1898 Lady Gregory, as she recounts in Our Irish Theater had a talk with William Butler Yeats about the forming of an Irish theater which could house the plays of the young dramatists. (2) "I said it was a pity we had no Irish theater where such plays could be given. Mr. Yeats said that had always been a dream of his, but he had of late thought it an impossible one, for it could not at first pay its way, and there was no money to be found for such a thing in Ireland. We went on talking about it, and things seemed to grow possible as we talked, and before the end of the afternoon we had made our plan. We said we would collect money, or rather ask to have a certain sum of money guaranteed. We would then take a Dublin theatre and give a performance of Mr. Martyn's The Heather Field and one of Mr. Yeats own plays, The Countess Cathleen."

The money was collected, and the first performance of the Irish Literary Theatre was announced for May, 1899, at the Ancient Concert Rooms on Great Brunswick Street, Dublin. The Countess Cathleen was bitterly attacked as anti-Irish and anti-Cath-

olic . In 1900 three more Irish plays were produced at the Gaiety Theatre: Maeve, by Edward Martyn, The Bending of the Bough by George Moore, and The Last Feast of the Fianna by Alice Milligan---and this time the Dublin audience was captivated. In October, 1901, the Irish Literary Theatre ended its official career, to give place to the Irish National Dramatic Company.

2. Douglas Hyde's The Twisting of the Rope

A memorable part of the 1901 season was the performance, for the first time on any stage, of a play in the Irish language: this play was Hyde's The Twisting of the Rope, put on by a company consisting of Dublin amateurs, and it marked the last time English actors appeared in any of the new Irish plays.

3. Separate identity of the Irish Literary Theater

Ernest A. Boyd, in The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, is careful to note the difference between the Irish Literary Theater and the Irish National Theatre which displaced it, as follows: I. "We must first establish the separate identity of the original Irish Literary Theatre, before coming to the now famous achievements of the Irish National Theater Company. The former was essentially a part of the so-called "Ibsenite movement", which led to the establishment of the Independent Theatre in London; the latter was a part of the general renaissance of Irish literature, whose progress made it possible for the national to embrace and transform the international movement of ideas." The latter, however, served as a stimulation to a new school of Gaelic dramatists, and demonstrated the necessity for having Irish plays acted by Irish players, even though Gaelic was to give place to English dialogue.

C. Formation of the Irish National Theater Society

Two young men named Frank Fay and William Fay, who were connected with a small company of amateur actors in Dublin, requested George W. Russell (A.E.) to write a play for their group. A.E. wrote his Deirdre for them, and brought W.B. Yeats to watch the rehearsals. ✓ "From this meeting Yeats came away with an admiration for the brothers Fay which induced him to give them his Kathleen ni Houlihan for production by their company. Thus it came about that on the 2nd April, 1902, the Irish National Dramatic Company presented these two plays at the Saint Teres'a's Hall, Clarendon Street, Dublin. This performance marks the real beginning of the Irish National theatre: for the first time the plays were written by Irish playwrights, acted by an Irish company, and staged by an Irish producer. Later in the same year another play by Mr. Yeats was presented by the company."

In 1903 J.M. Synge, Lady Gregory, and Padraic Colum participated in the society by offering In the Shadow of the Glen, Twenty-Five, and Broken Soil. ✓ "1903 is also the date of America's entrance into the history of the Theatre. The then recently founded Irish Literary Society of New York produced The Pot of Broth and Cathleen ni Houlihan, in addition to Yeats' Land of Heart's Desire, which had been revived in this country in ¹⁹⁰¹1901, after its original production at the Avenue Theatre in London, in 1894, but curiously enough, was not performed in Dublin until ten years later."

Allardyce Nicoll summarizes the movement as follows:

✓ "Here Mr. Yeats and Synge and Lady Gregory gathered about them a number of gifted authors; here flamed a torchlight of artistic

1. A.E. Malone: The Irish Drama --- Page 39

2. Ernest A. Boyd: The Contemporary Irish Drama of Ireland --- Page 37

3. Allardyce Nicoll: British Drama --- Page 388 (Thos. Crowell, N.Y. 1925)

excellence which became the model and the despair of many a writer across the Irish sea. In form this new drama of Dublin was a development of English drama. The language employed was English, not Gaelic; there were many signs that the writers of it had taken inspiration from the more noted works of our long centuries of London playwrighting. In atmosphere, on the other hand, the Irish theatre frequently veered away from the English stage. That imaginative idealism which has always characterized the Celtic races, that love of passionate and dreamy poetry, that only half-ashamed belief in the fairy world, the People of the Mist, all gave a particular tone to the plays produced at the Abbey Theatre. Mr. Yeats is a poetic dramatist, and Synge, writing in his peculiarly beautiful and imaginative prose, has little in common with the realistic playwrights in London."

D. Founding of the Abbey Theatre

The right of the Irish National Theatre Society to use the title was challenged by some members of the Gaelic League, who maintained that only a company using the Irish language could legitimately use the title. The Sinn Fein movement further intimated that only a theatre putting on propaganda plays could be rightfully called National and Irish. The Society was further hampered by small acting groups which were producing political plays, especially *The Daughters of Ireland*. When this opposition failed to stop the Society, charges of "immorality" were brought, particularly against Synge's In the Shadow of the Glen. This alleged ^{immorality} was the strongest argument made in opposition to the granting of a patent to the Abbey Theatre in 1904, together

with the antagonism of the other Dublin theaters, especially two which were controlled by a London syndicate. Nevertheless, a patent was granted to "Dame Augusta Gregory," with the restriction that only plays by Irishmen, or foreign plays by other than English dramatists, might be produced. The restriction has been removed now, and the theater is free to produce at will.

The housing of the company was accomplished because of the generosity of Miss A.E.F. Horniman, who provided and equipped an old theater in Abbey Street, after having it remodelled at an estimated cost of 13000 pounds. A.E. Malone says, "The very fact that the necessary financial support could not be secured in Ireland at the time makes the debt of gratitude which all lovers of the Irish drama owe to the generosity and the sympathy of Miss Horniman one which should always be kept in mind... the Abbey Theatre gave its first public performance on the evening of the 27th December, 1904, and remained open a week. During that first week four plays were performed, all being in one act, On Baile's Strand, and Kathleen ni Houlihan, by W.B. Yeats, Spreading the News, by Lady Gregory, and In the Shadow of the Glen, by J.M. Synge.

It was not until 1910 that the Theater became firmly intrenched in Dublin. At times, particularly when Synge's Playboy of the Western World was first produced in 1907, there were acrimonious attacks made on the organization. The first plays of such men as Lennox Robinson, R.J. Ray, T.C. Murray, Lord Dunsany, and Seumas O'Kelly were presented by the Abbey from 1907--1910. By ¹⁹¹⁰ ~~1911~~ a favorable audience had been secured, which grew steadily in numbers and enthusiasm.

II. Later developments in the Irish Theater

THE FOLK DRAMATISTS

A. It is not the purpose of this thesis to describe in detail the development of the Irish theater since 1910. That is a familiar story, especially to those who have read A.E. Malone's The Irish Drama and Ernest Boyd's The Contemporary Drama of Ireland. It would be useful, however, to outline briefly the outstanding trends in Irish play-writing.

The drama of Ireland has developed along somewhat different lines from those conceived by Mr. Yeats, who wished that the stage might portray "that life of poetry where every man can see his own image, because there alone does human nature escape from arbitrary conditions." Yeats himself appreciated and applauded the efforts of authors like Synge, Padraic Colum, and George Fitzmaurice, who have a very interesting folk drama to Ireland.

Synge's plays, while not numerous, are of high quality: he is not one of the greatest dramatists, but he is notable.

✓ "In his plays there are no 'joyless and pallid words'; instead there is a language which, if not indeed the ordinary language of the average Irish peasant, is in idiom and diction that of English-speaking Ireland selected and arranged by an artist in speech." His The Playboy of the Western World has been called romantic, but there is little in his work that is romantic except the fantastic plots and exotic language. Elsewhere he adheres rigidly to a realistic conception of life, if not to detailed facts. Of his Riders to the Sea Ernest Boyd says, ✓ "There are few more flawless tragedies than this little piece, with its subtle blending of diverse elements, from the realism of the cottage interior, displaying an intimate knowledge of Aran customs, to the symphonic quality of the appeal to the ear in the phrasing of the speeches."

Lady Gregory's folk plays, while they are authentic little bits of realistic drama, are usually too slight to admit of detailed criticism and summary. She usually starts with some ridiculous situation which will allow the characters to react in delightfully absurd ways. Her comedies have verve, zest, and genuine satire, and are among the most popular in the Abbey Theatre repertoire. ✓ "There is nothing in literature quite like her bewildered peasantry, a friendly critic has said, but neither is there anything in life. They are the product of a rich humanity, a keen sense of the ridiculous, and an unconscious snobbery, served with a garnishing of dialect speech which is magnificently effective for use on the stage."

In Padraic Colum's play The Land is stressed the conflict between the older generation of Irish peasants who fought tenaciously against any attempt to separate them from their little homesteads, and the younger generation which desires to experience the larger adventures of the world outside Ireland. It is a bitter comedy, and the characters are set forth with great fidelity. The Fiddler's House and Thomas Muskerri his only other important plays. His characters speak in the pedestrian language of the Irish Midlands, an approximation of the actual speech of much of Ireland. The method used by Colum in his dialogue and plotting led to a flood of cheap "peasant plays" which did little to advance the cause of the Irish theater.

The folk-dramas of Synge, Lady Gregory, Colum, and George Fitzmaurice were enthusiastically endorsed by succeeding Irish playwrights, who went further along the path of realism, and departed further from the nationalistic, poetic plays of Yeats.

B. The Realistic dramatists

Commenting in the October, 1930, issue of Drama Magazine on the drift away from folk plays toward the realistic play, Malone says, "It is significant, however, that at a time when the greater part of the world is becoming increasingly interested in 'folk' plays the Abbey Theatre should show definite signs of departing from its own tradition. It might be said that this departure began with the plays of Sean O'Casey, were it not a fact that O'Casey's characters are merely peasants in the environment of a Dublin slum. The departure is really due to Mr. Lennox Robinson who, in his own plays and in his capacity of manager and director at the Abbey Theatre, has been in a position to give his precepts the practice of the stage. Such plays as Crabbed Youth and Age or The Round-table long ago suggested that a new orientation of the Abbey Theatre and the Irish Drama was immediately probable, and when Portrait, The White Blackbird, The Big House, The Far-Off Hills, Give a Dog, and Ever the Twain, followed from him in rapid succession it became plain that he had finished with the 'peasant' play on which his early reputation had been founded. Any of these plays might be staged outside Ireland without much reference to the country of their being."

It can be said that from 1908, when the first play by Robinson was produced, the influence of the realists has been steadily increasing in Ireland, especially in the work of such authors as T.C. Murray, St. John G. Irvine, Seumas O'Kelly, Brinsley MacNamara, and Sean O'Casey. The plays of these men have been very well received in America, especially Boston, where the Transcript's H.T. Parker said many glowing things about them.

C. The less important Irish theaters

It should not be lost sight of that the Abbey was not the only native theatre in Ireland---there were other smaller organizations, mostly amateur efforts, whose efforts did much for the popularizing of drama in the country. The "Theatre of Ireland", the "National Players", the "Gaelic Repertory Theatre", and the "Leinster Stage Society" all had their share in the dramatic revival.

The Ulster Literary Theatre was particularly outstanding. Their inaugural season began in December, 1904, with a poetic play called Brian of Banba by Bulmer Hobson, and The Reformers, a satire by Lewis Purcell, both members of the Belfast Protestant National Society. Their dramatic review, Uladh, contained in its first number a dramatic legend entitled The Little Cowherd of Slainge, by Joseph Campbell, one of the most noted of the Irish poets.

✓ "Instead of becoming an integral part of the Abbey Theatre, the Ulster Theatre condemned itself to a precarious and intermittent career, producing its plays anywhere and everywhere, in competition with the playhouses of commerce."

Another interesting and recently formed organization is the Irish Amateur Theatre. It is described by J.J. Hayes in the Theater Arts Magazine for January, 1931, as follows: ✓ "The growth and development of the Irish Amateur Theatre since 1925 was such that, in 1928, the general council of Aonach Tailteann, that ancient Gaelic celebration inaugurated some 3000 years ago in memory of Queen Tailte, decided to include an experimental dramatic art competition in its already comprehensive program..... Drama, in the form known to us, was first included in Aonach Tailteann in 1928. No less

than ten groups took part and, of these, eight were Irish. The performances were given in the Peacock Theatre, the miniature playhouse constructed within the Abbey Theatre.... Each group was required to present two plays of contrasting character, that is, a tragedy or drama, and a comedy, and the whole evening's entertainment lasting not more than three hours. The plays, left to each group's own selection, ranged from works of the Abbey school to plays of Spanish, English, and American authorship... Two qualities are indispensable to competing players; they must be of Irish descent and they must be bona fide amateurs."

The leaders of this group feel that amateurism is the strongest foundation on which to build a national theater, and is the best weapon against commercialism, which relies upon London for its plays and players. American participation in the contests is particularly requested, and several college dramatic clubs have competed. There are all sorts of concessions to visitors, including admission to the Abbey at reduced rates, and cheap lodging at Trinity and University Colleges.

III. The importance and results of the Dramatic Revival

It has been said by St. John Ervine and George Moore that the Irish Dramatic Revival has somewhat fizzled out in late years, by others that it is not truly Irish since most of its plays are produced in the English language. As Malone points out, however, language is not the only distinctive mark of a nation--the nation is a spiritual thing, ✓ "a community of memories and of hopes". Also, there is a growing interest in writing plays in Irish forwarded by the Gaelic Drama League, which is subsidized by the Free State. In

the season 1928-29 this league produced ten plays as compared with the nine of the National Theatre Society. ✓ I. "Since the opening of the Abbey Theatre in December, 1904 to the end of the 1927-1928 season in May 1928 the National Theatre Society has presented 241 plays by 92 authors, and of these authors no less than 77 were Irish, and only a fractional proportion of the plays produced were by foreign authors. The figures alone show the hollowness of the denial that the Theatre and the Drama were and still are Irish. Nevertheless the growth of a drama in the Irish language is an encouraging sign of the times, and a sign that will be heartily welcomed by all who love the drama in whatever language it may be presented."

The work of the Abbey Theatre has been important because it has been an incentive to dramatic expression in Ireland--a form of expression that had to wait until the twentieth century to mature. It has been a model to other drama groups all over the country. It has survived numerous political stresses and its future seems assured. Its repertory system has produced native Irish plays and has given hospitality to native Irish playwrights. In spite of its brief history it has given to Ireland literary achievements such as no nation need be ashamed of.

More than anything, the work of the amateur and national theatres in Ireland has been valuable because it freed drama-lovers from the purely commercial theater which the English brought over.

✓ 2. "The English theater as it was organized in Ireland was a purely commercial affair. Its unliterary themes and second-hand methods were extremely distasteful to the Nationalists. They wanted a theater

and a drama not only reflecting the thoughts and lives of the Irish people, but serving at the same time to correct the absurd notion of Ireland and Irishmen spread far and wide by English and American dramatists in the form of that grotesque caricature, the Stage Paddy. They were actuated too by an intense fervor of patriotism. Irish culture of ancient time was either unknown or misunderstood outside Ireland. They became zealots in the idealistic cause of acquainting the world with their past attainments and their aspirations for the future. They began to realize that the printed word was as valuable for the accomplishment of their purpose as had been the sword. So the dramatic revival, at once the offspring of an intense love and a passionate dislike, came into being in Ireland."

Not only did the dramatic revival give interesting expression to the legendary and historical background of the Irish race, but it served as a relief for many Irishmen from the bitter factional strife and poverty within the country. In the words of Lennox Robinson "it countered the disillusionment of Parnell's fall."

During the last thirty-five years Ireland has been made "theater-conscious" and has learned to enjoy the spell behind the footlights---principally because of the efforts of the Abbey Theatre. This is all the more remarkable when it is recollected that Catholic Ireland has always entertained a suspicion of the drama. Indeed, that suspicion and dislike is not yet dead in Ireland, and it probably dates back to the time of the miracle plays in Dublin, when the theater was in the hands of the Protestant guilds. At the present time, according to Curtis Canfield, Ireland is drama-mad, although, as is the case in the United States and elsewhere, the talkies

are cutting deeply into the attendance at the legitimate theaters.
 I. "Spontaneous dramatization of any casual situation occurs everywhere. The drama, or rather the acting of it, is not confined to the theater alone. In the market-place, in pubs, or at public meetings one may detect a certain theatrical instinct of the people finding an outlet. This mimetic gift may again be explained psychologically; the make-believe taking precedence before the actual."

The outlook for the future of the Irish theater is promising; it is not probable that the stage will diminish in its importance in the national life. It has been ~~said~~ that because of its provincialism and preoccupation with national politics the Irish theater is bound to decay, and depend on the English companies again. But the newest crop of Irish dramatists recognize this danger and are preparing to avoid it. Instead of turning out the pictureque but narrow plays dealing with strictly Irish affairs, they are increasingly producing plays which demand the consideration of other countries; they are looking for a world market for their goods. The Irish Drama League and the Dublin Gate Studio, both semi-amateur groups, are especially active in forwarding dramatic internationalism.

The old-fashioned peasant play of Lady Gregory, Hyde, Fitzmaurice, and Colum are being superseded by the new type of peasant play such as Sean O'Casey's Juno and the Paycock, and The Silver Tassie. These plays concern the lower classes, to be sure, but they shift the emphasis from country to city. They are savagely realistic presentations of the denizens in the Dublin slums during times of stress. There is little of Yeats in this playwright. He

feels under no compulsion to give poetic treatment to legendary themes or to pour vituperation upon the enemies of Ireland. The underlying theme and thread which runs through these plays is the effect which the coarse,unfeeling city may have upon the desire to live cleanly and with some principle.

If it is to continue to prosper,the Irish Theater must address itself not to a clique,but to a world public. The Abbey must use the subsidy it gets from the Free State to discover new talent. Themes which were barred by the original founders must receive treatment. Dramatists must be kept informed of the latest developments in technique,and this can be done by according hospitality tothe works of foreign playwrights.

Although politics is still an engrossing game in Ireland,and although it is impossible to forecast what disturbances may arise from the nationalistic aims of De Valera and his party, it is no longer necessary for the Irish theater to concentrate its efforts on propaganda and national glorification. While propaganda plays are often vivid and powerful presentations of life, they are likely to be localized and narrow in their appeal. The Abbey Theater,affectionately regarded both in Ireland and in other countries,is now an adult theater,and must prepare to be universal in its significance.

After centuries of oppression and silence,Ireland is now possessed of a native theater which is articulate and progressive.

SUMMARY

In view of the spectacular emergence of a native Irish drama at the beginning of this century, and of the notable activities of today's Abbey Theater, it is interesting to examine the events and forces that lie behind the modern Irish stage. It is strange that the Gael, who is of an ardent and dramatic temperament, should have waited so long before founding a drama of his own race. Until the end of the 19th century, he gave but slender and uncertain support to the theater. In making this "survey", the writer was required to offer an explanation for the absence of an Irish theater until the 17th century, and of a native Irish play until the 20th century.

The savage tribesman of other races, terrified and puzzled by the mysterious Nature around him, enacted rude ceremonies to propitiate the gods. With singing and dancing he addressed rude pleas to his idols. These ceremonies, containing the germ of drama, became more and more formalized and elaborate until they possessed the semblance of a play. The religious drama of the Greeks, originating in the worship of Dionysus, was the foundation of much of our modern drama. In the case of the Irish, however, there seems to be no dramatic tradition which can be traced back to religious origins. Unlike the faiths of the Greeks and Romans, the Druidism of the pagan Irish seems to have been loosely organized, with little or no prayer, no supreme god like Zeus or Jupiter, and no temple of worship. There were no great religious occasions such as the Dionysiac festivals of the Greeks, where pageantry and ritual could shade

into dramatic conventions. Many of the great assemblies of Ireland were held near ancient cemeteries. Although the gods were not ignored here, the chief concern was with national and local government. At the "aenachs" or fairs a variety of amusement was afforded, but, curiously, it did not take the form of play-making or mummary. In all the list of entertainments at the fairs, there is no mention of dancing, an element which entered prominently into the drama of other early societies.

The function of the actor was taken over by the poet, who was called a file, a bard, or an ollamh, according to the number of years he had studied the art of recitation and story-telling. The bardic literature of Ireland, especially that which deals with the adventures of Chuchulain and the lives of Finn and Oisin, is a magnificent storehouse of plots. Had the Irish genius been devoted to stage presentation, these stories would have supplied rich material for a national drama. The semi-humorous dialogues between St. Patrick and Ossian, charged with the conflict between paganism and Christianity, were left unexploited for the purposes of the stage.

For three or four centuries from the time of St. Patrick's labours in Ireland (432--461) there was comparative tranquillity and progress in the country. Religion and learning were highly regarded, and a host of scholars, fleeing from the barbarians' armies on the continent, brought to Ireland a fine cultural addition. Under such conditions, it might be supposed that a native drama could arise. For several reasons this did not occur. First, the drama had ceased to exist as an institution in western Europe after the conversion of Constantine and the decline of the corrupted Roman drama. Second, the Irish, although they took no hands of plunderers
~~appears~~

abroad, were considerably disturbed by internal wars. The numerous tribal states often engaged in cattle-raiding forays which kept the countryside unsettled---usually the Irishman found plenty of excitement in the defence of his property. Third, the people rarely settled within an area large enough to be called a town, and a thinly-scattered agricultural population is not usually hospitable to the theater, which is a communal project. Perhaps, had there been a long enough period of peaceful development, there might have appeared something akin to the church plays which diverted the people on the continent.

Toward the end of the 8th century occurred the first of the Scandinavian invasions which caused terrible suffering in Ireland, until the reign of Brian Boru. The efforts of this great king to break the power of the Danes at last culminated in the battle of Clontarf in 1014. After the expulsion of the Danes and the death of Brian Boru, there were noticeable efforts made to bring all the chieftains under one head. Schools and monasteries increased in number, and there was considerable literary activity. Yet, on the whole, the Irish were regarded by the continent as a barbarous race. They were cut off from European civilization, and the idea of the democratic city-state had not reached them. The country continued to split into warring factions.

✓ I. " A civilization swept by Norse invasion before it had quite ripened; swept by Anglo-Norman invasion before it had quite recovered; a people plunged in an unimaginable chaos of races, religions, ideas, appetites, and provincialisms; brayed in the mortar

I. T.M.Kettle--Introduction to "Contemporary Ireland" by L.P.Dubois.

without emerging as a consolidated whole; tenacious of the national idea, but unable to bring it to triumph; riven and pillaged by invasion without being conquered---how could such a people find leisure to grow up, or such a civilization realize the full potentialities of development and discipline?"

Naturally, a war-torn country is not favorably disposed toward drama. In addition, Ireland was cut off from the influence of the liturgical drama which was being fostered by the church. Aside from its geographic isolation, the Irish church was but loosely connected with Rome, and preserved down to the 11th. century certain customs which came down from early Christian times, long after they had been forbidden by Councils.

In 1170, before the country had recovered from the Danish invasions, Strongbow landed with his mail-clad Normans, claiming Ireland for the English Crown. For the next three centuries the Irish records tell of tumult and pillage, although the rule of the Normans was in many ways beneficial. They fostered the growth of towns - and town-life meant a home for the drama.

The towns, however, were the centers of an English culture with which the Irish masses had little sympathy. There was intense religious controversy - a fact which prevented the trade-guilds from becoming Irish in character, since Catholics were generally barred from membership. Consequently, the miracle and mystery plays which were presented by the guilds won no serious support from the natives, and the mediaeval drama which had such a great effect on the Elizabethan theater was lost to Ireland.

The barbarous policies of Elizabeth again reduced

Ireland to extreme privation. The people were kept so busy protecting their poor crops and fleeing from invaders that it is not strange they could give little attention to the drama. The rebellion of Shane O'Neill, the rising of the Geraldines, and the revolt of Hugh O'Neill and Red Hugh O'Donnell brought further terror upon the land. The glorious days of Shakespeare offered little cultural stimulus to Ireland.

As a method of subduing the country, Elizabeth continued the "Plantations" which had been started by Mary in Leix and Offaly. These plantations of English landlords in the midst of Irish settlers occasioned a great deal of resentment and were a constant source of oppression. After the rebellion of O'More in 1641 there was ferocious religious warfare within the country. In 1649 Cromwell undertook to settle the Irish question once and for all by butchering large numbers of inhabitants. After the Restoration Ireland simmered, not too quietly, until William of Orange chased James II out of England. Thereupon Ireland became a battleground for two rival claimants for the English throne - an issue which was settled at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.

In the midst of all this confusion, however, the first real theater was established in Ireland. In 1635, when the London theaters were temporarily closed on account of the plague, James Sherley went over to Dublin and assisted in starting a new theater on Werburgh Street. The theater-going public, however, was centered in the Protestant capital, and the rest of the country displayed no interest in his efforts. Dublin itself regarded his theater coolly; the enterprising manager complained to friends in London that he was having a difficult time pleasing his audiences. Soon after, the theater

was closed owing to the Rebellion.

The harsh Penal Days of the 18th. century further impeded the growth of a native drama, although there was a flourishing Anglo-Irish theater in Dublin and Cork. One of the most famous theaters of the times was in Smock Alley. According to one historian: "The proper Name is Orange Street; but it took the Appellation of Smock Alley from Mother Bungy, of infamous Memory, and was, in her Days, a Sink of Sin; but a Man being found murder'd in these bottomless Pits of Wickedness, the Sheds were pulled down by the Populace, the unclean Vermin were banish'd, the Place purged of its Infamy."

About 1730, a theatrical booth was opened in Fownes Court by a lady named Madame Violante, who exhibited a first-class company of Jugglers, rope-dancers, and swordsmen. It was here that the famous Peg Woffington served her apprenticeship.

Despite the appearance of a new music hall in Crow Street, which opened with a ridetto late in 1731, Smock Alley continued to be the city's principal playhouse. Shortly afterwards, however, three young players named Luke Sparks, John Barrington, and Miss Mackay rented Madame Violante's booth and set out to produce some of Farquhar's comedies. The managers of Smock Alley thereupon persuaded the Lord Mayor to close the house of this new rival. The opposition to this move aroused the townspeople, and they subscribed money for the erection of a new playhouse in a part of the city which was outside the jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor; namely, on Rainsford Street. In 1734 a third theater was opened in Aungier Street, with Farquhar's The Recruiting Officer as the first offering.

The audiences of this period were tumultuous and disorderly. The population of the city was about 150,000 -- enough

to give fair support to the few theaters. The unguarded streets were often unsafe for peace-loving people. Robbers, beggars, drunkards, and quarrelsome gallants thronged the picturesque streets. The pillory was often in use; occasionally women were burned for the murder of their infants. Clubhouses were numerous, and here wealthy men gambled, drank, and duelled. Spectacles, processions, and street fights were common. In such a gay, dissipated capital the theater, of course, was often the center of exciting scenes. Riots within the playhouses were by no means infrequent, and on several occasions it was positively dangerous for certain actors to appear on the boards.

The most important performers of the period were Peg Woffington, James Quin (who had played at the Drury Lane in London) Kitty Clive (who numbered among her friends such men as Henry Fielding, George Farquhar, Horace Walpole, Goldsmith, and Dr. Johnson) Susanna Cibber, the daughter-in-law of old Colley Cibber. In 1742 David Garrick appeared on the Dublin stage. In 1743 the character of Richard III was played at Smock Alley by an unannounced young man who was later to figure prominently in Dublin theatricals -- Thomas Sheridan. Other famous performers were Spranger Barry, who first appeared in 1744 as the leading man in Othello, and Miss Bellamy, who played Desdemona to Sheridan's Othello in 1745.

During the last years of the century the Irish theater was in a constant state of tumult and change. Smock Alley and Crow Street alternately tasted prosperity, until at last, in 1790 Smock Alley went out of business and was converted into a storehouse for whiskey and flour. Later a church dedicated to

St. Michael and St. John was erected on the site. 1793 marked the building of a new theater in Fishamble Street.

During the 19th. century the commercializing of the theater and the growth of the actor-manager system hurt the play business in Dublin. The local stock companies declined, and visiting English companies received only languid support.

The Irish audiences did flock, however, to see the plays of a countryman, Dion Boucicault. This colorful personality had pleased large audiences in New York and Boston with his romantic, melodramatic treatment of Irish themes. "The Colleen Bawn," adapted from Griffin's novel "The Collegians" was a tremendous success, as was "Arrah-ne-Pogue" which is noted because it revived the popular old street-ballad, The Wearing of the Green. "The Shaughraun" which was founded on an episode in the Fenian insurrection of 1866, is said to have netted Boucicault over \$500,000. Although these patriotic plays of Boucicault and his followers were only melodramas of the most naive kind, they were Irish in outlook, and presented national history in a very vivid way.

Toward the end of the 19th century, the Irish, stimulated by the innovations of Ibsen, the Free Theater movement begun by Andre Antoine, the revolt against the commercial theater, and the activities of patriotic literary men like Douglas Hyde, Standish O'Grady, and W.B. Yeats, began to plan a distinctively Irish theater. Lady Gregory, Synge, Fitzmaurice, the Fay brothers, and Miss Horniman all took part in founding a theater which would give adult and eloquent expression to Irish life and ideals. The Abbey Theatre was started, as well as numerous amateur groups interested in freshening the drama. Capitalizing on the old Irish legends and

folk-lore, the new dramatists produced plays which quickly commanded world-wide attention.

During the past two decades, the realists have dominated the Irish theater, and men like Sean O'Casey and Lennox Robinson have been turning out plays which are somewhat freed from the narrow, nationalistic efforts of the early figures in the Irish Renaissance. Realizing that the earlier plays were somewhat circumscribed in their appeal, the modern Irish dramatists are striving to produce plays with more universal themes.

Although its history is a short one, the Irish theater has come of age. After centuries of waiting, Ireland now has a National Drama.

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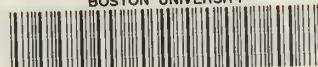
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